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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: MCAP PGOV SL

SUBJECT: DEMONSTRATION AT BARRACKS FORCES HIV/AIDS EVENT
CANCELLATION

¶11. (U) Summary: On December 3, an embassy-sponsored HIV/AIDS outreach event at the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces' (RSLAF) Wilberforce Barracks was postponed due to demonstrations by a group of discharged soldiers angry about their limited compensation. PAE Depot representatives handling logistical arrangements for the event decided to leave the scene due to security concerns. Though the protesters were quieted by the Ministry of Defense (MOD), Emboffs determined that the event should be delayed until December 10, to be certain that it would not be disrupted. End Summary.

¶12. (U) Classified as "chronically ill persons," the demonstrating soldiers were relieved of their duties as part of the RSLAF's downsizing exercise, which also includes retirement-age soldiers and those considered "wounded in action." The UK and Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) collaborated on the downsizing exercise, with the UK sponsoring buy-out packages for certain classifications of soldiers, and the GoSL responsible for the others. This demonstration was a protest against the GoSL's limited buy-out funding, and the fact that the wounded in action are receiving considerably more from the UK. The MOD met with the demonstrators, and promised to review their situation.

¶13. (SBU) Comment: The MOD's attempts to appease the former soldiers are likely a delaying tactic, since there is no funding available to supplement the packages currently being offered. The downsizing exercise, though seen by many as needed to streamline the force and make its numbers appropriate given the country's relatively peaceful state, is a hard-sell to the soldiers that rely on the RSLAF for their employment. Many are unskilled as civilians, and have few prospects for employment. The inequity between packages adds to this controversy. End Comment.

PERRY